SHAKER DRAWER 4A Religious CONTACTS

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Abraham Lincoln and religion

Shaker

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I

"Yankee Communes ~~by~~ Another American Way" by Flo Morse - copyright 1971 by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.

page 66 - refering to Elder Frederick Evans

"President Lincoln found Evans an exceptionally able man when he went to Washington in 1863 to petition for draft exemptions for the Shakers. He pointed out to the President that the Shakers had saved the United States Government more than half a million dollars. Many members who had fought in the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 before becoming Shakers had never drawn their soldiers' pensions.

"Well" asked Lincoln, "what am I to do?"

"I can't advise the President," Elder Frederick answered.

"You ought to be made to fight," said Lincoln. "We need regiments of just such men as you." Nevertheless, he granted the petition giving the brethren an indefinite furlough.

"The Shaker Adventure" by Marguerite Fellows Melcher - copyright 1968 - The Press of Case Western Reserve University.

II

page 171 - For the time being the Shakers again won their right to act according to the dictates of their consciences. But once more the question arose in 1862, when George Ingels, a Shaker of North Union, Ohio, was drafted into the United States army. Benjamin Gates, one of the New Lebanon trustees, visited Lincoln in Washington and got a reprieve for Ingels. Frederick Evans also had an interview on the subject with Lincoln. Acting on the suggestion of the President and the War Department, he sent duly certified petitions to the proper authorities at Washington asking exemption for all Shakers. So convincing, apparently, were his arguments, that these petitions were granted, to apply to all Shakers conscientious objectors.

III

Page 177 - refering to Elder Frederick Evans

He proved himself a good representative. When he went to Washington in 1863 to confer with President Lincoln in the matter of Shaker exemption from military service, he was able to prove to the President and to Secretary Stanton that since many of the early Shakers had been Revolutionary soldiers who did not draw their pension

"Our members had thus omitted to draw from the government over half a million of dollars due as pensions for military service."

IV

"The American Shakers" by Henri Desroche copyright 1971- The University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst.
page 234-

The Northern government used force to impose its law. Young Shakers were forcibly enrolled in the Army and then, because of their passive resistance, they were thrown into irons. At one point Elder Evans presented a petition personally to President Lincoln. The President must have appreciated the elder's willfulness, because he told him: "You ought to be made to fight. We need regiments of just such men as you." But Evans had something to offer in exchange: the $600,000 in undrawn pensions that legally belonged to the society through those Shakers brethren who were veterans of preceding wars. In consideration of this sum, the government sent the Shaker recruits back to their families on indefinite furlough. Shaker cooperation in past wars had been good enough to pay for their noncooperation in the present one. Under the sign of the dollar the Shaker argument sumed

most urgent. A similar demand made by the Western societies in 1863 (footnote - These details and related religious questions are presented in detail in his Open Letter to Pope Leo XIII, dated 11 September 1891. A French translation of this letter by Paul E Passy may be found in his "Liefna", colonie coopérative agricole Paris 1910) also resulted in the recognition of the Shakers' right to be considered conscientious objectors.

most urgent. A similar demand made by the Western societies in 1863 (footnote - Anna White and Leila Taylor, "Shakerism, Its Meaning and Message" (Mount Lebanon, 1905), pp 182-83 and 196-99, give two of these requests. On page 199 they quote E. M. Stanton, the Secretary of War, who recognized the special rights of this religious community, "whose conscientious scrupules adjure war or the payment of commutations fee.") also resulted in the recognition of the Shakers' right to be considered conscientious objectors.

V

"The People Called Shakers" by Edward Deming Andrews - copyright 1953. Dover Publications Inc., N. Y.

page - 215 -

In its early years the community of South Union suffered from the inroads of both the Confederate and Union forces, maintaining its faith by impartial ministrations to the sick, wonded, and hungry of both sides. But the draft law of March 1863, re-opened the issue of military service. Before its passage the Central ministry had advised the brethern at Union Village "to give freely to the Sanitary Committee for the benefit of the suffering soldiers [but] not to take hold of a gun or do

anything as a soldier, not pay a fine, hire a substitute, or pay instead, that the government may hire one in the room of a
* * Shaker." Immediately afterward, Benjamin Gates and Frederick Evans interviewed Lincoln and presented Secretary of War Stanton with a memorial requesting exemption on the grounds of the religious character of the institution, the constitutional rights of conscience, the precedent set by the states, and the "radical nature of their doctrinal and conscientious scruples, vital to their faith, against taking up arms or taking part in controversies and business affairs of the world." Added to the petition was a wholly new claim for exemption, namely, that there was a sum of money, amounting (with interest) to $439,733, in the national treasury that legally belonged to the society through those who had served in the wars of the Revolution and 1812 but had ~~to~~ not been permitted by Shaker regulations to draw their pensions or bounty lands. Since only about seventy Shakers were liable to Civil War service, the petitioners argued, the government would recieve in fines an amount equivalent to but 3 4/2 per cent of the unclaimed money. After listening to the Shakers, Evans later recalled, Lincoln leaned back in his chair and asked:

"Well what am I to do?"

"It is not for me," Eldr Frederick replied, "to advise the President of the United States."

*** "You ought to be made to fight," Lincoln said. "We need regiments of just such men as you."

Nevertheless, the petition was granted and the draftees given an indefinite

**** furlough

* For an interesting account of the South Union society's experience in wartime, based on the diary of Eldress Nancy Moore of the South Union ministry, see White and Taylor, op. cit., III page 180 - 195. See also Nancy Lewis Greene, "Of Olde Shaker Bells" (Lexington: 1930), which includes Civil War records of the Pleasant Hill community.

** 'Union Village Church Record Books' (1862), Vol. XI (manuscript in the library of the Western Reserve Historical Society).

*** Memorial regarding 'An act for enrolling and calling out the national forces, and for other purposes' (1863). See also White and Taylor, op. cit., page 182-183

**** White and Taylor, op. cit., page 182

footnote #295. page 333

In August 1863, John N. Rankin and Harvey L. Eads, of the South Union, Ky., society, wrote to President Lincoln regarding the troubles the society had experienced as a result of inroads by both the Confederate and Union armies. They reaffirmed their objections to war and pleaded for the release of the 'few young persons' at South Union threatened with enrollment and draft, persons 'on whom so much depends, seeing especially each one has more to do for the support of others, than the only son of a widow, now by law exempt.'

In December several brethern were drafted, but the Provost Marshal at Bowling Green informed them that he had received a letter, dated 30 December, from Secretary of War Stanton, stating, 'If there is any religious Community within your district, whose conscientious scruples adjure war, or the payment of commutation fee, you will parole them indefinitely ...' White and Taylor, op. cit., page 197-199.

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